

January 13, 2017
1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Division
Region 2 Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Missoula Conservation District
Missoula County
King Ranch Golf Course
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Enclosed is an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward the replacement of a fish ladder on Mill Creek, a tributary to the Clark Fork River. The project site is located near the King Ranch Golf Course, near the community of Frenchtown in Missoula County.

Please submit any comments by 11:59 PM on February 12, 2017 to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address listed above. The funding for this project through the FFIP is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish & Wildlife Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle McGree", followed by a horizontal line.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Fisheries Division Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Mill Creek Fish Ladder

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that direct Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This legislation was amended again in 2013 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the FFIP.

The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward the purchase of a fish ladder. This project would replace the fish ladder with a larger, more operational unit to provide year-round fish passage on Mill Creek.

I. Location of Project:

This project will be conducted on Mill Creek, a tributary to the Clark Fork River, located at the King Ranch Golf Course in Frenchtown, within Township 15N, Range 21W, Section 34 (SW1/4) in Missoula County (Figure 1).

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's Statewide Fisheries Management Plan for the fisheries management program is to "restore and enhance degraded fisheries habitats." By implementing an improvement project and restoring important habitat, this proposed project would help meet this goal. The proposed project replaces a non-functional fish ladder with an appropriately-sized, durable unit that will reconnect vital habitat for trout. The ultimate goal is to restore habitat by providing year-round fish passage for fluvial trout and Mountain Whitefish populations.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to replace a fish ladder on Mill Creek. The overall goal is to connect vital habitat, which will benefit fluvial trout and Mountain Whitefish. This project is expected to cost \$24,096. Of this total, the FFIP would contribute up to \$9,000 and the remaining funds would be provided by:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
Westslope Chapter Trout Unlimited		\$9,040
Montana Trout Unlimited	\$6,056	
Total Match: \$15,096		

IV. Environmental Impact Review Checklist:

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment

Project Title: Mill Creek Fish Ladder

Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)

Description of Project: This project would replace the fish ladder with a larger, more operational unit to provide year-round fish passage on Mill Creek.

A. POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			X			X
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		X
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			X
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species				X		
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species			X			X

B. POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation				X		
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		X
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

No changes in streamflow would occur in Mill Creek as a result of the proposed project. Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. A 318 authorization will be obtained, if necessary, to meet short-term water quality standards.

4. Existing water right or reservation.

Although this project will affect a fish ladder installed on the King Ranch Golf Course Diversion Dam, it will not impact any existing water rights or reservations.

7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats.

This project would replace a non-functional fish ladder with a larger, appropriately sized ladder. In 2005, a fish ladder was installed to allow fish passage on the recruitment-limited and heavily fished stream. The ladder has functioned adequately for a decade but is now in need of replacement. Long-term, this project should increase aquatic and riparian habitats by connecting stream reaches that are used by Rainbow Trout, Rainbow X Cuttbow Trout hybrids, Brown Trout, and Mountain Whitefish.

10. Changes to abundance or movement of species.

The fish ladder replacement should increase stream connectivity by repairing an obstruction to fish passage. The new ladder will be large enough to accommodate fish movement and minimize the potential for future damage to the structure. The impact is considered positive and could positively impact salmonid populations in Mill Creek.

VI. Explanation of Impacts to the Human Environment

8. Cultural and historic resources.

No cultural or historical resource impacts are anticipated. However, the State Historical Preservation Office will be notified of the project, and any potential concerns will be addressed.

VII. Narrative Evaluation and Comment.

There are no anticipated cumulative effects.

VIII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative.

If no funding is provided through the FFIP, either the applicant would have to seek additional sources of funding to complete the project, or the non-functional fish ladder would remain in Mill Creek.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to restore connectivity on Mill Creek.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

1. Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

Missoula Conservation District

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None.

3. Is an EIS required?

No. We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

4. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the FFIP has been posted on the FWP webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the FFIP. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish & Wildlife Commission, and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The EA will be distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: www.fwp.mt.gov.

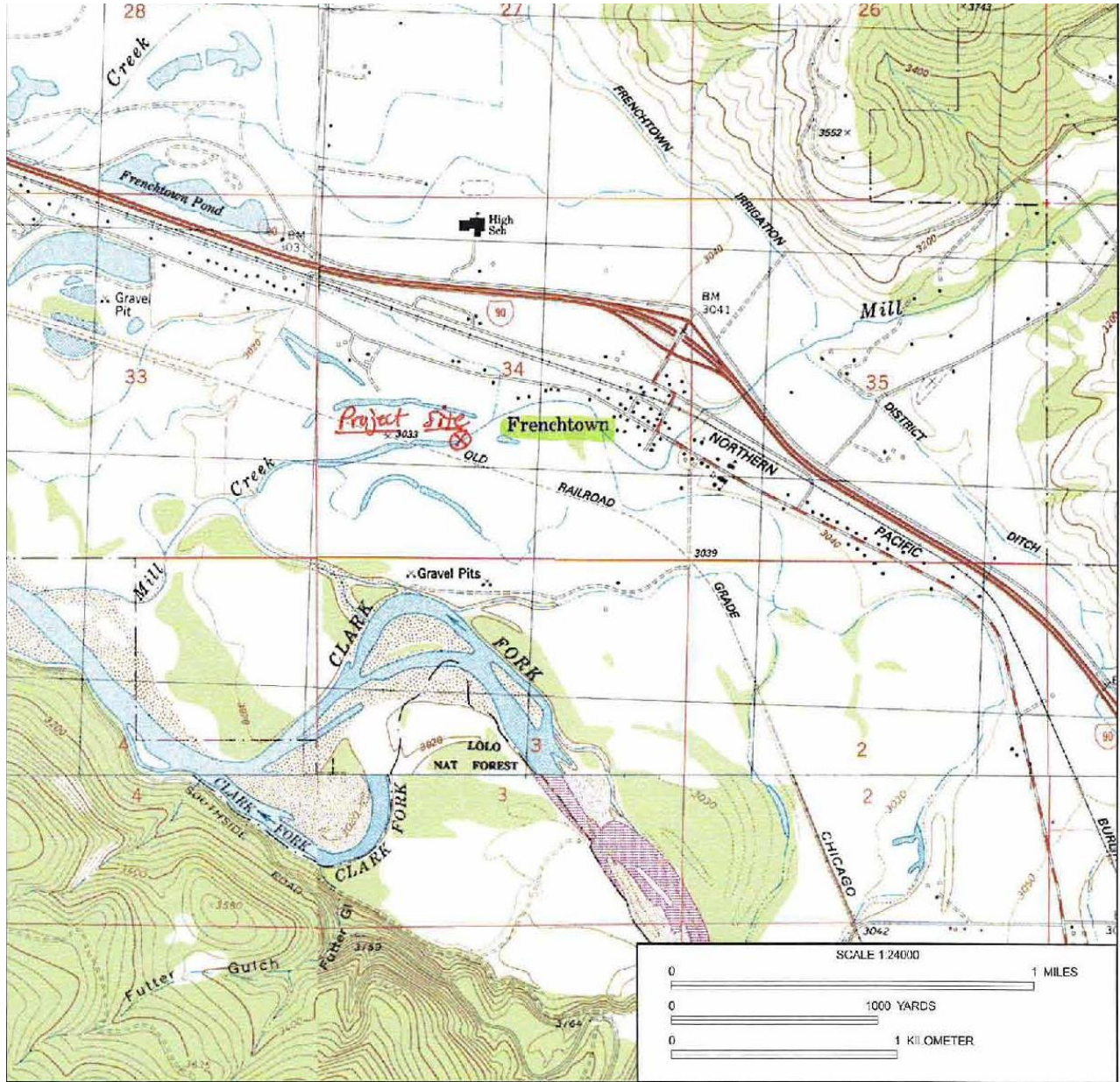
5. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 11:59 PM on February 12, 2017.

6. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
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FIGURE 1: project location



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